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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan provides general information about local courts and tells how a teacher can prepare a class visit to the courts. Includes an outline on four popular government textbooks. (BT)

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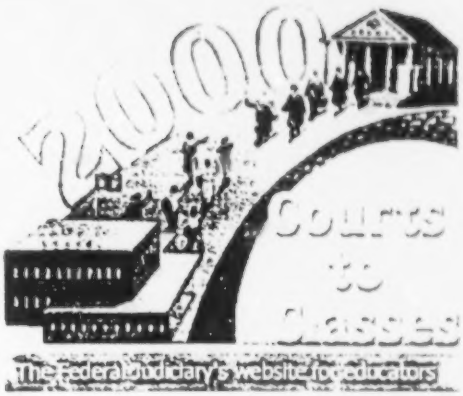

Federal Court Resources

A Lesson Plan for High School Law-Related Educators to support "Understanding the Federal Courts"

SO 032 468

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Washington, DC 20544

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General Guidelines for Educational Visits to Federal Courts

What can students and teachers do at the courts?

There are many learning opportunities for teachers and students at federal courts. Teachers should call the court they want to visit to find out what services are available there to help students learn about the court system. Many federal courts have web sites. Teachers may want to visit the local court's web site through www.uscourts.gov links before arranging a trip to the court. Some suggestions for activities are listed here:

Observe a trial

Often there will be a court session when students are visiting. Most, but not all, of these sessions are open to the public, including groups of students. Teachers can find out what is on the docket for the day they are planning to visit and request to bring students into the courtroom. Students should be prepared for the visit so that they understand what they see (see below). Proper rules of decorum, including dress codes, must be followed if a class comes to observe a court session.

Take a tour

Taking a tour of a federal court can help students better understand court procedure and the jobs of those who work in the courts. Students will learn what happens in the federal court behind the scenes, information they don't see on television court dramas. While students usually cannot visit judges' chambers, they can tour a courtroom and talk to court personnel about how trials and hearings are conducted. If time permits, students may even be able to role play certain aspects of court procedure, such as voire dire, in the courtroom.

Interview/converse with a judge or other personnel

Many judges are willing to talk to students about the federal courts and their role in them. They will often speak to students in an empty courtroom to help students visualize the procedures they describe. However, judges have ethical guidelines that prohibit them from discussing cases that are pending before them. Speaking personally to a judge can demystify the court experience for students, making them less fearful or suspicious of the legal process. Other participants in the legal process also may be willing to speak to students. Federal prosecutors and public defenders can help to illuminate the adversarial system. No matter who speaks to the students at the courts, it is important that students be prepared for the interaction. Help them draft questions before and during the visit to ensure a productive learning experience.

How does a teacher set up a visit to the court?

To set up a visit, teachers should contact the clerk's office in the court they wish to visit. Because the courts tend to be very busy, teachers should be prepared to allow several weeks of lead time when they are arranging a visit. The telephone number for the clerk is usually listed in the phone book. The personnel in the clerk's office can help teachers select an appropriate date for a class visit and can even find out what cases are on the docket if students wish to observe a court session. The clerk also will provide important logistical information, such as parking, for court visits. Some questions you may want to ask the clerk's office:

- How many students may I bring to the court at one time?
- Which days and times are best to bring students to the court?
- What can my students do at the court?

- If we come to see a specific case and it settles, is there a back-up activity we might do?
- Are there any reading materials or web sites about the court I could review before we visit?
- What are the rules of decorum and dress the students must follow?
- Are there any judges who would be willing to speak to students? Prosecutors? Public defenders? Other court personnel? How can I set up a meeting with them?

How should teachers prepare students before visiting the courts?

The best time to visit a court is during a unit on the judicial system or the rights that the system protects. In this context, students can put their new knowledge to use by observing and interpreting court sessions and finding out more information from judges and other court personnel. In particular, it may be helpful for students to learn about the structure, functions, and procedures of the court before attending. U.S. courts have a set of basic lesson plans about the federal judicial system that teachers may use for free.

However, it also may be useful to conduct one or more lessons on judicial basics while the students visit the court. Judges and others may then help conduct lessons. If there is a structured activity for students, teachers, and court personnel to engage in while at the courts, the students may find the experience more interesting than simply being talked to. If you choose to conduct a lesson while at the court, be sure to talk to the judge or other court employee before hand to make sure that they understand their roles in the learning process. The federal courts offer interactive lesson plans at <www.uscourts.gov> "Courts to Classes."

If students are interviewing or conversing with court personnel, it is often helpful for them to prepare questions before visiting the court. Students can write questions that relate to information they already have learned about the courts, or satisfy their curiosity about an issue they may have seen in the media or other source. You may give students some guidance on their questions by providing models or steering them away from inappropriate questions. For instance, a judge will not be able to talk about a case that is currently before the court, but can answer questions about procedures that students may have seen while observing a session.

How should teachers follow up with students and court personnel?

Following up on a visit to the court is just as important as the preparation for the visit. Teachers should reinforce learning from the court experience through continued classroom activities on the judicial system. Whenever possible, refer to what students learned while at the courts to help them make connections between the court and their classroom experiences.

It is also important to follow-up with a note of thanks, preferably signed by the students, addressed to those who helped make the experience meaningful. Before leaving the court, be sure to get the names and addresses of those who set up the visit or spoke to the students.

Links to Popular Textbooks

	Remy, Richard C. (2000). *United States Government: Democracy in Action*. New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.	McClenaghan, William A. (1999). *Magruder's American Government*. Needham, MA: Prentice Hall.	Miller, Roger LeRoy (1999). *Wests American Government* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati: West Educational Publishing.	Kelman, Steven (1999). *American Government*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (Harcourt Brace & Company).
Lesson One: The Federal Courts in American Government *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 1-4	Ch. 3 "The Constitution," pp. 66, 74-75. Ch. 12 "Supreme Court Decision-Making," pp. 336-341, 347-348.	Ch. 3, "The Constitution," pp. 58-59.	Ch. 3, "The Constitution," pp. 68-70. Ch. 20, "The Federal Courts," pp. 548-554.	Ch. 3, "The U.S. Constitution," pp. 48-50. Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 263-266.
Lesson Two: The Structure of the Federal Court System *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 5-6	Ch. 11 "The Federal Court System," pp. 306, 312-316.	Ch. 18, "The Federal Court System," pp. 463, 468-471.	Ch. 20, "The Federal Courts," pp. 536-538.	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 252-253.
Lesson Three: The Distinction between Civil and Criminal Law *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 15-18	Ch. 15 "Law in America," pp. 430-443.	Ch. 25, "State and Local Government in Action," pp. 672-673.	Ch. 20, "The Federal Courts," p. 536.	Ch. 12, "The U.S. Legal System," pp. 273-280.

	Remy, Richard C. (2000). *United States Government: Democracy in Action*. New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.	McClenaghan, William A. (1999). *Magruders American Government*. Needham, MA: Prentice Hall.	Miller, Roger LeRoy (1999). *Wests American Government* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati: West Educational Publishing.	Kelman, Steven (1999). *American Government*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (Harcourt Brace & Company).
Lesson Four: Judicial Independence: An International Comparison *Understanding the Federal Courts*, p. 1				Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 263-266.
Lesson Five: The Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 7-10	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 305-307.	Ch. 18, "The Federal Court System," pp. 462-464.	Ch. 20, "The Federal Court System," pp. 538-540.	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," p. 250.
Lesson Six: Qualifications and Background of Federal Judges *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 11-13	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 316-317.	Ch. 18, "The Federal Court System," pp. 465-466.	Ch. 20, AThe Federal Court System,@ pp. 545-548.	Ch. 11, AThe Federal Court System,@ pp. 253-254.
Lesson Seven: Qualifications and Procedures for Jury Service *Understanding the Federal*	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," p. 315.	Ch. 20, "Civil Liberties: Protecting Individual Freedoms," pp. 531-533 Ch. 25, "State and Local	Ch. 20, "The Federal Court System," pp. 538-539 Ch. 24, "State "Government," pp. 669-	Ch. 12, "The U.S. Legal System," pp. 278-279.

Courts, pp. 19-20		Government in Action," pp. 673-674.	670	
	Remy, Richard C. (2000). *United States Government: Democracy in Action*. New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.	McClenaghan, William A. (1999). *Magruder's American Government*. Needham, MA: Prentice Hall.	Miller, Roger LeRoy (1999). *West's American Government* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati: West Educational Publishing.	Kelman, Steven (1999). *American Government*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (Harcourt Brace & Company).
Lesson Eight: Voire Dire Simulation *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 19-20	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," p. 315.	Ch. 20, "Civil Liberties: Protecting Individual Freedoms," pp. 531-533. Ch. 25, "State and Local Government in Action," pp. 673-674.	Ch. 20, "The Federal Court System," pp. 538-539 Ch. 24, "State Government," pp. 669-670	Ch. 12, "The U.S. Legal System," pp. 278-279.
Lesson Nine: Court Procedure *Understanding the Federal Courts*, pp. 14-18, 23-24	Ch. 15, "Law in America," pp. 433-435, 438-443.		Ch. 24, "State Government," pp. 664-670.	Ch. 12, "The U.S. Legal System," pp. 275-280
Lesson Ten: Mini-Moot Court on Current Supreme Court Case	Ch. 12, "Supreme Court Decision Making," pp. 330-335.	Ch. 18, "The Federal Court System," pp. 471-476.	Ch. 20, "The Federal Courts," pp. 541-545.	Ch. 11, "The Federal Court System," pp. 258-262.
Guidelines for Arranging a Visit to the Federal Courts				